

Availability of Groundwater Resource in Southeastern New Hampshire

Project Update – May 6, 2002

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This summary updates those involved in the discussions regarding the Availability of Groundwater Resource in Southeastern New Hampshire project. The Availability of Groundwater Resources in Southeastern New Hampshire is a joint project between the NH Geological Survey (NHGS), NH Office of State Planning (OSP), NH Department of Environmental Services (DES), US Geological Survey (USGS) and the communities of southeastern NH. The purpose of the study is to provide communities, planners and industry with new tools and data to make informed decisions about water supply and to plan for future growth. The project will provide several products to all 42 communities in the coastal watershed, including:

- A report describing the water use by user type and land use component in their community
- An estimation of water supply based on available data and professional judgement
- Information from monitoring wells and basic hydrologic data
- Surficial geology maps and data for the study area
- Access to data developed for their community on historic water use and supply
- Evaluation of MODFLOW as a modeling tool for water supply planning

This project has gone through a great deal of planning, discussion and negotiation over the past 6 months. Three advisory groups have commented on the project, budgets and work plans are being finalized, contracts are being written and a long-term advisory group will be formed. Each subheading below describes the current status of each part of the project.

Groundwater Model

The first of these was a technical group assembled in January of this year. This group looked at the modeling component of the project. The primary concern of the group was the ability to model the movement of groundwater through bedrock at a small scale. The general consensus was that this type of work is at the cutting edge of groundwater modeling and should still be viewed as experimental. In response to this, the modeling component of the project was scaled back to a pilot study in the 12 communities directly along the coast. These communities were chosen because they have the best resolution of data to enter into the model. The model results will inform the project participants of the effectiveness of the model to answer town-specific community planning questions.

NHGS Data Collection

Also, over the past few months, the NH Geological Survey and DES have refined their data collection portion of the project, including: surficial geology, groundwater monitoring data database and well network, identification of large water users, and water supply profile for each community. Also, the NHGS/DES match has increased from the originally proposed \$32,000 to over \$150,000. Grants have been awarded to DES from the NH Estuaries Project and the NH Coastal Program to fund the initial “data mining” that needs to occur to find existing groundwater information and to begin digitizing the surficial geology maps.

Community Participation

On April 17, the communities who are partners in this project met amongst themselves to discuss the project. To date about 12 communities have promised financial support for the project. The primary concerns voiced by this task force related to the changing nature of the project since it was originally proposed. The group pointed out the need for monitoring project progress, milestones and deliverables and to identify opportunities for volunteer data gathering. Finally, the task force encouraged the highest quality local data be generated since the towns wish to use the project results for planning and land-use decision-making.

Water Use Assessment

A second technical advisory meeting was called in April to look specifically at the water use section of the project. That group was asked to assess the USGS approach to see if the proposed level of effort was warranted. The water use group met on April 24 and a conference call was held on May 7 for those who could not attend the earlier meeting. In general, both groups endorsed the USGS approach. The primary request of USGS was that they should work closely with the water suppliers to collect available water use data before incurring the expense of a great deal of original data gathering, i.e. avoid reinventing the wheel. Both groups also agreed that the water use data is important for community planning and may help to inform regional water policy.

Budget

The proposed project budget is presently \$1.5 million. Of this, \$801,235 is needed as cash, the rest is in match. The USGS portion is \$564,245 and the NHGS/DES portion is \$236,990. The USGS match is 1:1 and the NHGS is bringing over \$150,000 in match. The proposed funding sources are NH Coastal Program -- \$150,000; NH Estuaries Project -- \$25,000; communities -- \$125,000; and congressional appropriation -- \$500,000. Congressman Sununu and his staff are working on the appropriation which will hopefully be in the FFY 2003 budget.

A cooperative agreement with USGS is now being written with about \$20,000 in funding in this fiscal year. That funding will cover the initial data gathering phase of the water use assessment and the conceptual model/data requirements for the modeling component.

Advisory Team

A Groundwater Project Advisory Team (GPAT) is being set up to provide long-term guidance to the project. This will be a subset of the folks who have participated in the previous advisory and task force meetings. The GPAT will meet quarterly for three years and help to ensure that the project stays on track and useful products are created.

Kick-off Event

Congressman Sununu will attend a project kick-off event to take place at the North Hampton Elementary School at 3:30 on May 31, 2002.